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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for students preparing for college admissions interviews are presented, including results of a survey of admissions directors. Questionnaire responses were obtained from all but three directors of 48 public and 52 private colleges and universities, including the Ivy League and highly competitive schools and each state's main state university. Directors indicated whether interviews were required, the percentage of students who interviewed, and the value of interviews. They also offered advice for prospective applicants, which is summarized. In addition to discussing stages of the interview (beginning, middle, and end), pre-interview and post-interview processes are considered. Topics include: summer versus fall interviews, making an appointment, the college folder, researching the school, campus tours, questioning students, the role of parents, what to wear to the interview, reactions to the interview, important discussion topics, reactions to the campus visit, and the applicant's thank you letter. In addition to the on-campus interview, the pre-application campus visit, college nights or fairs, and alumni interviews are addressed. Appendices include practice interview questions, an interview evaluation form, the survey questionnaire, and a list of selected college guides. (SW)

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# COLLEGE ADMISSIONS FACE TO FACE

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## Prepare Yourself for Interviews and Campus Visits

ANN S. UTTERBACK, Ph.D.

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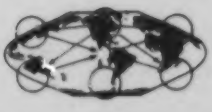
# COLLEGE ADMISSIONS FACE TO FACE

## Prepare Yourself for Interviews and Campus Visits

ANN S. UTTERBACK, Ph.D



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To David and Carol Lynn Yellin

and all those in my life who have taught me that only by taking chances do I risk new possibilities.

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# To the Parents . . .

This book is written specifically for the high school student preparing for college admissions interviews. It is my hope that this step by step guide which takes the student through all the phases of the college admissions interview will work to lessen the stress and anxiety that most students feel when facing interviews.

By addressing the high school student, however, I do not mean in any way to minimize your interests as a parent in the college admissions process. With tuition costs at some colleges as high as $45,000 for four years, your child's college education may well be the largest single expense you will encounter as a parent. In addition, this is an expense that is plagued with variables: Will the college be right for your child? Will your child be happy there? Are the facilities the best that are available for your child's special interest? Will the college degree carry the prestige that is needed to compete in today's job market? Does the college offer the best education available for the money? Will financial assistance be available? No doubt all these questions leave you, an educated consumer, filled with anxiety when considering such a large investment that affects your child's welfare. You are probably wondering what you should do to insure the right college choice for your child.

My research into the college application process has shown me that the on-campus interview is a key factor in choosing the right college. Chapter 6 offers an insider's view with advice from admissions directors, and many of them have reiterated my

belief that the campus visit and interview are the most effective ways to match a student with an appropriate college. I believe that the on-campus interview should be a well-planned communication encounter that gives a student: first, an opportunity to find out how he or she may fit into a particular college environment; and second, the opportunity to be an individual and not just a name on an application. The interview is the only part of the application process that allows a human interaction to take place. Therefore, it can offer a unique way for a student to evaluate what a particular college has to offer and how appropriate that college is for him or her. Just as none of us would take a new job that involved relocation without going for at least one interview and looking at the community, we should not expect students to make a four-year commitment based on phone calls and college literature. Whether applying to a state university or a private college, students should have an opportunity to make their own evaluations.

Evaluating colleges on their own does not exclude you from the trips to campus. Chapter 3 outlines how the campuus visit can be structured so that it is fulfilling for you as well as your child. Concerning the interview, however, I can only tell you that every admissions director I talked with stressed the fact that parents should <u>not</u> take part in the actual interview. Robert E. Brownell, Executive Assistant to the Director of Admissions at the University of California, Berkeley, summarizes what appears to be the feeling of most admissions directors by saying that if parents insist on attending the interview with their child they should "take a temporary vow of silence." The interview should be an interaction between the potential student and the representative of the college.

You may hold some misconceptions that leave doubts in your mind about the wisdom of sending your sixteen or seventeen year old out alone on an interview as important as the admissions interview. Keep in mind that this book is directed to the student who may have little or no experience with interviews. Encouraging your child to read this material and to follow the advice given is the best way for your son or daughter to prepare for what to expect and how to handle different interview situations.

You may also feel that because of your son's shyness or lack of maturity he does not represent himself well. Or your daughter may seem to lack the ability to talk about her most positive traits. Believe me, admissions directors are very familiar with the insecurities of high school students. Their job is to conduct a directive interview that will pull out the most reticent student. And even if your child does not become the interviewee you would hope for, he or she has still succeeded in the two goals of the interview by getting impressions of the college and by showing the interest to appear on campus. Furthermore, shyness is rarely considered a negative factor when evaluating students. It is expected that with maturity will come an ability to handle communication situations.

A more dangerous misconception is that students can talk their way into certain colleges by sounding like their own public relations managers. Admissions directors appear to be in agreement on their dislike for the student who comes on too strongly. Claire K. Matthews, Associate Dean of Admissions at Wesleyan University says, "I am most impressed by students who can develop a line of thought, who demonstrate quickness, humor and a sense of the large world. I am unimpressed by excessive self-involvement or narrow-mindedness." Putting it more bluntly, Robert Brownell from Berkeley says, "Those [students] I find least appealing are those who leave the impression that my school is but a brief detour on their upward path toward the corporate executive or even President of the United States." Giving your child the impression that the interview is a performance that will win an acceptance at a particular college is not only untrue, but it is unfair to your child. The student will undoubtedly feel tremendous pressure to act a part for which he or she is poorly prepared. They do not know and you do not know exactly what the admissions director is looking for, so the performance is sure to fail. "Be yourself" is the best advice you can offer your child.

Looking at the ways in which the interview is used on different campuses reveals that being yourself is the only way to adapt to the various types of interview situations. Chapter 2 explains how on one campus the interview may be an informal chat that is perceived by admissions directors as a way to sell their

college to students. On the other hand, at another college it may count as much as SAT scores or high school grades. Most private colleges perceive it much as Peter H. Richardson, Director of Admissions, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, does:

> We view the interview as an informal exchange--information about the student and information about MIT--and the report which is written serves as one of six written descriptions of the student that we have when making an evaluation of the student's application. The interview report is one source of information about the student, one witness if you will. No individual description of the student is considered by us to be more reliable than any other. It is the combination of descriptions that we receive from the student, counselor, teachers, and interviewer that gives us the picture of the human being. . . . We do, indeed, make two judgments--one personal, one academic.

The personal judgment is important, but as Richardson explains, it is usually made up of several factors. Therefore, the goal of the interview should not be to score points with the admissions officer. Instead, the interview should give the student a chance to form some personal reactions to each college that will be extremely helpful when the time comes to make a choice.

You may feel that getting your child into your alma mater or into the most prestigious college means you have won at the college admissions game. This is not always the case, however, and your real goal should be to make the best possible match between your child and the appropriate college. As your child prepares to visit campuses and to take part in what may be his or her only human encounter with a college prior to acceptance, you should be prepared to trust your child's reactions. Armed with the knowledge gained from this book, your child should be a successful participant in the college admissions interview process.

# Preface

Shortly after I graduated from college, I worked as the Appointment Secretary in the admissions office at Cornell University scheduling admissions interviews for applicants. I also arranged campus tours and greeted applicants and parents when they arrived in our office. The strongest memory I have of that job is sitting behind my desk in the admissions office waiting room, furnished with oriental rugs and ivy league decor, and observing a room filled with terrified high school juniors and seniors waiting for interviews. Many times I felt more like a dentist's receptionist when I made the dreaded announcement, "The admissions director will see you now." I wondered then why this was such an ominous event in the minds of most students. Knowing the interviewers in our office, I was distressed to see students dreading an encounter with such likable professionals.

As a college instructor teaching interviewing techniques and having weathered many interviews of my own, I know now that any interview situation creates tension for many reasons. The college admissions interview is not unique in its ability to produce sweaty palms and a dry mouth. Look around in any personnel office filled with job applicants, and you will see that same look of terror. The only thing that will lessen the terror is knowledge:

Knowledge of yourself;
Knowledge of what to expect in the interview;
Knowledge of the school or company where you are applying;
Knowledge of the skills that can make you a good interviewee.

Imparting knowledge in these areas is the purpose of this book. After reading the chapters that follow, you will have a degree of self assurance in the interview situation that only comes from a thorough knowledge of the event.

# 1
# The Value of the Interview

Each year thousands of high school students like yourself face the important and difficult task of selecting a college. Some of you have planned for college since the ninth grade with strict curriculum choices and "educational" summers. Others of you may not have begun considering college until late in your junior year in high school. Whatever your approach has been, all of you eventually reach an important stage in the process of preparing for your college career: narrowing your choices and going through the application process for these colleges.

As you may have discovered already, the application process has many parts. For most colleges you must complete the application itself, submit your grades, teacher recommendations, personal essays, SAT scores, and financial aid statements. You may feel, at times, as if the forms and writing will never stop!

One part of the application process is much more human, however, and can be the most important factor in matching you with the institution where you will spend your college years. This part of the application process which puts you on the campus and allows you to talk directly with a representative of the college is the admissions interview. Not to be confused with a casual, unplanned visit to a campus, the admissions interview should be a well-planned communication encounter with two purposes: first, to give you an opportunity to find out how you might fit into a particular college environment, and second, to give you the opportunity to present yourself as an individual and not simply as application number 468 out of 16,991.

## Types of Interviews

Before concentrating our discussion on one type of interview, the official on-campus interview, we should consider all types that are open to you as a college applicant. The chapters that follow will deal specifically with the on-campus interview, but there are other types summarized below that can be helpful in giving you knowledge about a particular college. (For more information on these additional types of interviews, see Appendix A.)

### Pre-Application Visits to Campus

Many high school juniors and even sophomores plan trips to visit campuses that hold interest for them. These trips often are worked into family vacations. They may be casual, involving mainly sightseeing, but a well-planned visit will prove much more beneficial. With a little pre-planning, you can tour dorms, libraries, and even sit in on classes. Many students also like to stop by the admissions office to pick up a catalog and talk informally with admissions personnel.

The pre-application visit to campuses is an excellent way to narrow your choices of colleges. You may find, for example, that the location of a college is important to you. The urban setting of Temple University in Philadelphia may be more challenging to you than a rural, college town campus such as Dartmouth. Similarly, you may need to actually visit a large campus like the University of Illinois or the University of Michigan, to discover that you would not be as comfortable there as in a small, private college. These decisions are best made early in your college planning, and the pre-application visit will be of great assistance as you begin to narrow your choices. This type of visit will not meet the requirement of an official interview, but it can be beneficial when you begin to consider colleges.

Another type of pre-application visit that works well in the early, planning stages of college selection is the group tour. Some high schools and private organizations offer tours to campuses and arrange interviews with someone from the admissions office at each college. These interviews usually work as a question and answer session for all the students on the tour.

This does not qualify as an official interview, but it does offer a relaxed atmosphere for you to find out more about a college.

College Nights or Fairs

High schools often provide opportunities for students and parents to meet with admissions representatives at College Nights or informational sessions. Some counties also hold College Fairs where many colleges are represented. Admissions personnel travel extensively every fall to the larger cities around the country to participate in these events. If a representative from the admissions office cannot attend your College Night or Fair, an alumnus working with the office might participate.

As with the pre-application visit and the group interview, talking to a college representative at a College Night or Fair does not replace the official on-campus interview. These events do provide, however, an excellent opportunity for you to learn more about a college and also to interact with a member of the admissions staff. In addition, if you have an opportunity to talk to a representative on a one to one basis, you might be able to make a lasting impression that will be remembered during the selection process. At the very least, you will have a name to refer to later when you request your on-campus interview. You may want to request that this representative interview you, or inquire if you can say hello to this person when you visit campus. It is to your advantage for as many people as possible to remember you when your file comes up for review.

Alumni Interviews

Alumni play an important part in the admissions process for all colleges. Since it is not realistically possible because of financial or geographic reasons for all students to have on-campus interviews, alumni provide a network of liaisons between students and the admissions office. Many colleges fly alumni volunteers to campus to attend training sessions in interviewing and to update their knowledge of the school. These representatives are then given the task of interviewing students at the local level. They may participate in College Nights as has been pointed out, or they may conduct official interviews and

file reports with the admissions office that become part of a student's application file.

Georgetown University is an example of a school that relies heavily on their alumni interviews. In fact, an alumni interview is required for every applicant at Georgetown. More students, therefore, have alumni interviews than campus interviews. To accomplish this, Georgetown has a network of over 2,000 alumni worldwide who are an important part of the admissions process. They are updated with quarterly newsletters and workshops to polish their interviewing skills and keep them current on campus happenings. In this instance, the alumni interview is as important as visiting the campus.

Getting to know alumni in your community who attended colleges you are considering is an important step in the admissions process. Whether you are talking with an alumnus in an official capacity as an admissions representative as would be the case at Georgetown, or casually with a friend about their alma mater, you can gain valuable knowledge about a particular institution.

For all the advantages talking to an alumnus offers, you should keep in mind that it is one step removed from being on campus. All the training sessions and newsletters cannot replace the knowledge and experience of someone who is on campus everyday. Admissions counselors know the current scene at their school better than anyone else you can talk to. Alumni provide a valuable service, but your ultimate goal should be to visit the campuses of the schools to which you apply.

All of the interview situations discussed so far are important in helping you decide which college is right for you. They all provide excellent opportunities for you to gain information about specific colleges which will make you a more active, knowledgeable participant in the admissions process. The situations discussed also give you a chance to practice your interviewing skills to prepare yourself for the most important and challenging interview: the formal, <u>on-campus interview</u>. Since a report of this interview will most probably become part of your admissions file (especially if you are applying to a private or highly competitive college), terror usually strikes at the thought of this encounter. The other interview situations may seem like

practice, but this is the real thing! Many students find the thought so frightening that they question the value of putting themselves in such a tense situation.

Why Interview?

When answering the question, "Why interview?", most students and parents will automatically respond that it will increase your chances for acceptance. Many people seem to feel that just by showing up for an interview a student will have an added advantage when files are reviewed. Unfortunately, this is not the case for two important reasons.

First of all, at some colleges (especially state institutions) the interview may only be an information sharing session which is not written up and filed. As we will find out later in this chapter, you stand to gain a great deal from all college interviews, but unless they become part of your admissions file, they usually do not affect acceptance.

Secondly, a poor interview may be worse than no interview at all. At most competitive colleges where the interview report is read as part of the admissions selection review, comments like, "This student seemed bored and uninterested in our college" or "This student's only question was 'How long is spring break!'" can heavily influence acceptance. If a decision must be made between two equally qualified applicants, a poor interview report can be a deciding factor.

So if these two things are true, what is the value of the interview? Why should you put yourself in this tense situation? Perhaps Richard C. Skelton, Dean of Admissions, Bucknell University, says it best:

> [The interview] is an opportunity for the student to make a measurement of that college or university, and also an opportunity for the college or university to personalize what can be a very impersonal decision making process.

Skelton stresses the really significant value of the interview: it provides a personal way for you, the student, to have a human interaction with a representative of a college. No better way

exists for you to discover your own impressions which will help you find the college that is right for you.

To recognize the value of the interview, let's look at the other means you have at your disposal when trying to make your college choice.

You may begin your search for the right college by reading viewbooks and other college produced literature. This can tell you a lot about a college, but you should realize that these publications are advertising literature for colleges. Many schools actually hire advertising agencies to promote their best image through their literature. Therefore, the bigger the budget, the better a school will look on paper. You may be seeing your college choice through the eyes of Madison Avenue.

You should not depend on the advertising rhetoric and carefully selected photographs as your sole source of information about a school any more than a smart consumer would depend solely on advertising when making a large purchase. A New England college, for example, may be pictured as existing in perpetual autumn with sunny days and students in shirt sleeves. Needless to say, no photographs showing the usual snow and slushy streets are included. Also, how often do you see photographs of the mass lecture classes with 500 or more students? College literature would lead us to believe that average class size at most colleges is 15-20 students. Clearly an applicant who depends solely on viewbooks and other college produced literature is in for some surprises!

What about letting your high school guidance counselor work as your main influence in the selection process? Surely your counselor has your best interests in mind. In most cases this is true. You should work closely with your counselor throughout the admissions procedure, but allowing him or her to make up your mind for you is not a good idea. Most counselors would be the first to admit that their primary job is to make information available to you so that you can make an intelligent choice of what college is right for you. The temptation must exist, however, to place 10% of a high school graduating class in Ivy League schools (Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale). It is hard to escape the status and mystique of the Ivy League. High

schools, especially private ones, have a lot to gain from sending graduates to big-name colleges.

Parents also may be affected by the status of prestige schools. Harvard, for example, may appear to be the "ticket to success" to your business minded dad, but it will not meet your hidden desires to receive a degree in theatre. Parents also may tend to romanticize their alma mater. They may put subtle pressure on you to relive their college years. The small, liberal arts college they attended 15 or 20 years ago may have changed into a large, impersonal university, however, and your experiences there stand little chance of resembling theirs.

Certainly not all guidance counselors and parents try to pressure students into choices, but many students do feel that the decision is out of their control. In some sense you may feel that you will be lucky to be accepted anywhere, and you may also feel that being accepted at a prestige college will be the best thing that could ever happen to you. In reality, the best thing that could happen is for you to find the best match with a college that meets your individual needs.

Your Impressions Count

You should keep in mind that when your freshman year begins you will be starting your college career on your own. Your guidance counselor will not be there. Your parents will not be there. You will be the one living with the choice you made during your senior year in high school. With this responsibility in mind, you should look on the college selection process as one in which you should be actively involved. This means more than writing a good personal essay, reading viewbooks, and attending College Nights with your parents. It means using every available outlet to find out as much as possible about each college. This may be the first time you have to face the difficult task of becoming an educated consumer, but remember, the choice you make is one you will live with for four years. Others can help you in this decision, but your impressions count for a great deal.

One of the best ways to make your own impressions is by visiting campuses and taking part in the interview process. This involves more than showing up and asking, "Hey, what's it like

here?" To gain the knowledge you will need to assist you in making a good decision, you need to become the best interviewee you can.

# 2

# Can the Interview Affect Acceptance?

Before beginning the process of learning how to be a good interviewee, you may still be wondering if going to interview is important enough to warrant your time. When I began working on this book, I was curious about exactly the same thing. I wondered about the significance given to the college admissions interview in the acceptance process. When I worked in the Cornell admissions office, I observed the admissions directors writing reports of interviews which were filed in the respective applicants' folders. These reports varied in length from a paragraph to a page or more. I always wondered whether these reports affected the evaluation process. This questioning led to the recent survey I conducted which asked admissions directors specific questions about the interview and its significance. The questionnaire probed three areas: 1) whether interviews were required; 2) the percentage of students who came for an interview; and, 3) the value of the interview. In addition, the survey asked for comments from the admissions directors about advice for prospective applicants (see Chapter 6). A copy of the questionnaire and the statistical results can be found in Appendix D.

## The Scope of the Survey

The questionnaire was mailed to 100 colleges across the United States--48 to state and 52 to private colleges or universities (these will be referred to as private colleges throughout this book). The private colleges included all the Ivy League and former Seven Sister schools. (The Seven Sister colleges were

once considered to be Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley.) In addition, questionnaires were sent to most of what are considered the highly competitive private colleges, for example, Amherst, Brandeis, Colgate, Duke, Georgetown, MIT, Rice, Swarthmore, and Tufts. The state universities represented 48 different states (excluding Connecticut and Pennsylvania), and an attempt was made to reach the main university in each state such as the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the University of Iowa in Iowa City, and the University of Hawaii in Honolulu.

The results of this survey were somewhat of a surprise. The first surprise was that 97 of 100 admissions directors who received questionnaires returned them with their responses listed. As you will see in Chapter 6, many had quite lengthy and specific advice for students like yourself. The next surprise was that admissions interviews appear to vary dramatically in significance from a casual chat to the equivalent of an employment interview that can have a great influence on acceptance (see Appendix D).

Interpreting the Survey

What do the survey results mean to you? They may mean that if you apply to four or five colleges, your interviews could run the gamut from very casual informational sessions to highly structured, very important official interviews. If, for example, you applied to two schools on the east coast, you could go from a highly competitive interview situation such as at Barnard or Yale College where the interview "could influence the decision between applicants who are otherwise equal" to the University of Virginia where the interview evaluations "are not filed."

At this point you may be wondering how you can possibly prepare yourself for all these various situations. You may wish that the survey had gone to two or three thousand colleges and that this book would include a list of every college and what their specific responses were to all the questions on the survey. That way, you could look up each college and try to be what they want. The answer is much simpler than that, however. All you have to do is remember that the basic purpose of any college

admissions interview is to match you with a college that is appropriate for your needs.

By far the largest percentage of schools nationwide do not perceive the interview as the most important factor in evaluation for admissions. The survey results indicate, however, that at most private colleges the interview does carry some weight, and it can help admission possibilities especially if you are weak in another area or if you are competing against others with identical qualifications. But the survey results show that this does not apply to all colleges.

What does apply to all colleges is that the interview presents an opportunity to find out more about the school and to present yourself as a human being and not just a name on an application blank. Jean A. Scott, Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Duke University says, "I would recommend that the student look at the interview as an opportunity to let admissions officers get to know him or her as a person." She goes on to stress, "If the student sees the interview as an opportunity to learn about and evaluate the college, he or she is likely to approach it in a positive frame of mind." The goal, then, does not involve trying to figure out what the interviewer is looking for and going into the interview trying to be that person. Instead, you should go in as yourself with adequate preparation and confidence in your ability as an interviewee. This will allow you to handle the interview well and to use the experience to help you make your college choice. This is a personal goal that applies to state as well as private colleges, and it is not affected by the value a college places on the interview evaluation. As Richard A. Silverman, Associate Director of Admissions, Yale College, points out, "Don't try to 'impress' the interviewer; just have a good, engaged conversation, and the 'impressions' will take care of themselves."

In order to have a good, engaged conversation, you need to know how to prepare yourself for your college admissions interviews and what to expect. The next few chapters will take you through this process.

# 3

# The Pre-Interview Process

Now that you have seen that the interview can affect acceptance and, more importantly, provide a human encounter with a college, there should be little doubt that it should be a major part of your college search. Whether a school lists the interview as required, recommended, or optional, you must make every effort to interview at all of the colleges you are seriously considering.

Once you have narrowed your choices to a few schools to apply to (most counselors recommend you cover the spectrum of schools with five or six choices ranging from long-shots to at least one that seems to offer guaranteed acceptance), you are ready to begin arranging your interviews. Of course, personal factors such as school obligations play a big part in scheduling interviews, but other factors should be considered as well.

## Summer Interviews

Many students, parents, and guidance counselors, feel that the summer after the junior year is the ideal time to interview. There are advantages and disadvantages to this choice.

On the positive side, most admissions personnel are in their offices in the summer and their interviewing schedules are usually light. This means your interview time might extend past the usual 30 minutes. There might also be more time available at the end of the interview for your parents to meet the interviewer and chat informally. These factors, combined

with the obvious bonus that a more relaxed interviewer may write a more thorough report for your file, make the summer choice appealing.

Personal factors may also make summer an attractive choice for you. You should consider that unless you are attending summer school or working in the summer, visiting in June, July, or August will mean you will not have to miss school or work. If your grades are not the best, you will definitely want to consider summer travel to colleges. Your midyear school report showing your senior year grades will greatly affect your admission chances at all schools. Taking off every Friday to visit colleges in the fall can play havoc with your chances of having a good midyear report during this important semester.

Another important personal consideration is that your family may be able to turn college interviewing into a pleasant family vacation. If you plan to apply to four colleges in the east, for example, a two-week trip can easily include your interviews plus some vacation travel for the whole family. Campuses are usually lovely in the summer, and they offer a place the entire family can enjoy. Since the student population is usually small, parking and touring are not the hassle they might be in the fall. Most campuses offer places the whole family can picnic or relax while you take care of the official business of interviewing. At some schools, it is also possible for the entire family to stay in a dorm and participate in campus activities.

Summer travel to campuses, however, does have some disadvantages. Almost all departments limit their schedule of classes, and most faculty members try to take summers off for research and relaxation. This makes for less congestion on campus, but it changes the population you will find at a college. The students you see on campus in the summer, for example, may not be representative of the typical student population because they may be from other colleges picking up college credit while they are home for the summer. The faculty may be mainly teaching assistants replacing the vacationing professors. All in all, you do not get a very accurate picture of most colleges when you visit in the summer.

If you are applying to a particular college, however, and you schedule a formal interview in the summer, the visit will

fulfill the requirements for an official interview. The advantages of having a relaxed interview, not missing high school classes, and seeing campuses in the beauty of summer, may outweigh the disadvantages for you. That choice is up to you and your parents.

Fall Interviews

Most admissions interviews are scheduled for September through December of a student's senior year. This means that these months are the busiest for admissions personnel. During these months, most offices are open during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, and on Saturday morning. Most of the admissions staff conduct interviews a good part of every day. Faculty members and student assistants are also called upon to interview to take some of the load off of the regular admissions staff.

The disadvantages of fall interviewing are a direct result of this onslaught of students to campus. Time schedules become very important, and, to avoid conflicts, a 30 minute time limit is usually imperative. This means if you are engaged in a stimulating conversation and your 30 minutes are up, your interviewer has no choice but to draw the interview to a close. This can be a frustrating time for admissions personnel as well as a tiring one. Many directors are also traveling at this time visiting high schools and appearing at College Nights, which increases the pressure on them (see Appendix A). In short, the admissions counselor you would talk to in July may not appear to be the same person you might talk to in October because of the difference in his or her work load.

On the positive side, fall is the best time to get an idea of what a college is really like. School spirit is usually at its highest with football games and campus events. The faculty and student population is similar to what it might be a year later when you could possibly enter as a freshman. In general, things are active with lots of classes to observe, labs to visit, and students to talk to. These factors make the fall a good time to schedule your on-campus interview.

The Best Time for You

Both summer and fall offer advantages and disadvantages as an interviewing time. To assist you and your parents in making this choice, here is a summary.

SUMMER

Advantages

* - You will not miss high school classes during your important senior year.
* - You may be able to combine your interview trip with a family vacation.
* - Campuses are usually beautiful at this time of year.
* - Parking and touring the campus are easier without the crowds.
* - Admissions offices are not as busy as in the fall.
* - You and your family may be able to stay in a dorm.

Disadvantages

* - Fewer students are on campus to give you a feeling of campus life.
* - The students on campus may not be representative of the typical population.
* - Regular faculty may not be teaching.
* - Fewer classes are available to observe.
* - Dorm life may not be representative of the regular school year.

FALL

Advantages

* - You will see the campus with the regular student population there.
* - All the faculty will be on campus.
* - Many classes will be available to visit.
* - Laboratories will be in use to observe.
* - Campus social life will be in full swing.

Disadvantages

* - Admissions offices are very busy and your interview time may be limited.
* - You may be the eighth or ninth student in one day to be seen by your interviewer.
* - You may be scheduled to talk with a faculty or student interviewer (This should not be a factor since these inter-

viewers are selected by the director of admissions and are as respected as any of the interviewers. You may feel that your preference, however, is to talk to a director.).

* - You will probably miss some high school classes to make your visit.
* - You will probably not be able to stay in a dorm unless you have a friend attending the college.
* - Parking and touring the campus may be more difficult with the entire student body on campus.

Making an Appointment

Once you have decided when to visit, your next task is to arrange an appointment with the admissions office. I highly recommend that you telephone the office rather than writing. If you plan to visit in the fall, you may need to offer some alternative dates and times. Finding a mutually agreeable time can be accomplished much easier over the phone. The telephone number of the admissions office should be in their college catalogue, or you can find the number in most college guides (see Selected College Guides).

I suggest you, and not your parents, do the calling since this will initiate your interaction with the school. Sit down with your parents and compile a list of possible dates and times before placing the call. Again, if you want to visit in the fall, you may have to be very flexible. Making the appointment as far in advance as possible is also a good idea (especially if you wish to visit on the sought-after Saturday mornings). Call at least six weeks before you plan to visit and allow more time if requesting a Saturday appointment. With an early request, you have the best chance of getting your first choice.

As with any interview, timing is important. The standard advice in employment interviewing is never interview on Monday morning or Friday afternoon. This may be a bit too rigid, but you should keep in mind that admissions personnel are human. Being the last interviewee of a busy week may put you at a disadvantage.

When you call, ask for the appointment secretary or announce your desire to make an admissions interview appointment. Do not ask for the Director of Admissions. You may get him or

her, and it will be most embarrassing when you tell the Director that all you want to do is make an interview appointment!

When making the appointment, feel free, however, to request that it be with one of the directors if you will feel slighted talking to a faculty member or a student representative. As has been pointed out, these interviewers are well respected and sometimes even more interesting than the directors, but if you will feel discriminated against, ask for someone else.

When talking to the secretary, also inquire about tours, places to stay including dorms, and classes that are open for observers. Information regarding these matters can usually be mailed to you from the admissions office.

Before hanging up, be sure to request a written confirmation of your appointment. Most schools send these automatically, but it does not hurt to check. You never know what mix-up might occur, and you would not want to go to the expense of traveling to a campus only to find out that your interview is not scheduled. If possible, ask the secretary to put the name of your interviewer on your confirmation as well. This will allow you to know with whom you will be speaking when you arrive.

Your College Folder

When your confirmation card arrives, you should start a folder on that school if you have not already done so. This may sound like naive advice, but applying to college is like any other complicated process: organization can be the key to success. Do not depend on your desk drawer as a filing system. Having all your application papers well organized and at your fingertips during an interview can be most impressive.

I suggest you buy folders with pockets on each side. Color code these so that you have one for each school, making them easily distinguishable. This is not a time to practice your lettering and artwork on the outside of your folders since you will want to take these with you on your interviews. A clean, professional looking folder will reflect a serious attitude to your interviewer.

In addition to your confirmation card, you might want to include in your folder any other correspondence you have gotten

from the college. You should also place an unofficial copy of your transcript in each folder in case your official one has not arrived when you interview. Any other papers or items that you feel might be useful in the interview can be kept in the folder. Some students cannot resist the urge to show the interviewer the editorial they wrote for the high school newspaper or their artwork that appeared in the annual. Remember that the interview is not a time for "show and tell," however, and that your time will be limited.

The folder will also be of assistance in another way when you make your college visit. It will provide an organized place to put any information that you might pick up while on campus. It is hard to make a good impression on an interviewer when you are dropping maps and flyers you got in the student center. As you will see later, every nonverbal action is important.

Researching the School

Perhaps the most important and most overlooked step in preparing for an interview is researching the college you will be visiting. Almost every admissions officer responding to the questionnaire I sent out said emphatically that students should know about the college where they are interviewing. Here is a sampling of comments taken from the questionnaires:

| | |
|---|---|
| Rice (Texas) | Know something about the institution--do your homework! |
| Smith (Massachusetts) | Prepare: read college literature beforehand and prepare good, informed questions. |
| Wesleyan (Connecticut) | Students preparing to interview ought to know something about the school where they are interviewing. They can read the Admissions Bulletin, take a campus tour and talk with current students. |
| Colgate (New York) | Don't ask questions that can be answered with a number. |
| University of New Hampshire | Attend the interview with some knowledge of a particular institution. |

The general feeling is that the interview time should not be wasted giving answers that are available in the school literature. As David Gould, Dean of Admissions, Brandeis University, advises, "Know about the school you're visiting. Don't ask, 'How many books in your library?'" A question such as this can easily be answered in any college catalog or guide. In general, you should not ask any question which is answered in print. As the admissions director from Rice says, "Do your homework! This only makes good sense for you since your interview time is limited. Why waste it asking simple questions? Not only do these questions take up valuable t me, they also reflect badly on you as an interviewee.

If you find that the college catalog does not give you all the information you need, there are specific books that give you up-to-date statistics about colleges (see Selected College Guides). These guides are quick references that will tell you enrollment figures, faculty size, library holdings, costs, majors offered, and student profiles. College guides are available in most libraries and guidance counselors' offices. If you decide to buy one or two of these publications, they make an excellent investment at the beginning of your college search giving you comparative data about hundreds of colleges. They also give you the type of information that you should be very familiar with before walking into an interviewer's office.

You might also want to schedule a campus tour prior to your interview so that you will have the added advantage of knowing the campus slightly before you interview. You may notice something on the tour, for example, that you wish to ask about during your interview. In short, if you know as much as possible about a school beforehand, you will be a more intelligent interviewee, and the interview time will be more valuable for you and the admissions office.

Campus Tours

Tours are available on almost every campus. As stated earlier, the appointment secretary should be able to give you all the information you need concerning a tour: where it begins, times, and if it is a walking tour or a motor tour. Many schools such as Southern Illinois University at Carbondale have

special tour-trains or buses to take you around their very large campuses. If you or your parents would have trouble participating in a walking tour for any reason, it is especially important to request information about a motor tour.

Orientation is the most obvious advantage of tours, but another advantage is that they generally put you in contact with one or more of the student leaders on campus. At most colleges, being selected as a tour guide is an honor reserved for the best students. They are usually very articulate and want to be of assistance. Taking advantage of their knowledge and experience by asking them probing questions can be most helpful to you. Asking the question, "What do most students gripe about on this campus?" for example, will probably evoke a more realistic answer from your tour guide than from your admissions interviewer.

Questioning Students

You should come up with a list of probing questions to ask your tour guide and any other students you have a chance to talk with while visiting campus. As with the above example, these questions can be more hardhitting than the ones you compile for your admissions interviewer. Do not worry about asking a controversial question.

While you are on campus, seek out some students to talk to in the dorms or student center. Tell them that you are an applicant, and you would like to know the "inside story." Just as when buying a car you might ask a friend who owns one if it really lives up to the salesman's claims, you should ask students what it is really like at their school.

Here are some sample questions you might consider.

Can you study in the dorm relatively undisturbed?

As a woman (black, hispanic) do you feel you are respected on this campus?

Are most professors really available during their office hours?

If I decide not to join a sorority (fraternity), will I be looked down on?

How is the food here?

Do students really have a voice in administrative policies?

What student organizations have the most clout?
What is the worst thing about going to school here?
What is the best thing about going to school here?

Let me caution you that students can be very opinionated about the school they attend. It will be hard to find a student on any campus, for example, who will tell you the food is superb. Your answers might also be affected by the time of the semester. Few students love a school during mid-term and finals week. If you visit at a time when students are especially pressured by exams and papers, you will probably get some biased viewpoints. Keep these things in mind when considering responses to your questions.

If you compile some information from your questioning of college students prior to your official interview, you will be a more knowledgable interviewee. You might also want to follow-up on some of these questions with your admissions interviewer. You will need to soften your approach if pursuing these in you interview, but it might be helpful to hear the view of a member of the administration.

Parents or No Parents

This is perhaps the most difficult decision to make when planning an on-campus interview visit. It is difficult because there are advantages and disadvantages to each choice. Your parents will certainly have their opinion about whether to accompany you on your campus visits, but you should also consider your own feelings.

There are times during your campus visit when having your parents with you will be a definite handicap. Not many students will sit down and talk with you comfortably, for example, if your parents are looking on. Even the youngest and most personable parents are still parents. They will be perceived as authority figures. Therefore, if you really want to get some honest answers from students in an informal manner, you do not want your parents there.

Surprisingly, parents can also be a problem during your official interview. I can remember interviewers at Cornell practically having to strap parents in their chairs in the waiting room when their child was interviewed alone. Some

parents were so belligerent that they finally were allowed into the interview, much to the dismay of the interviewer. Their aggression and control over their child would undoubtedly be reported in the student's file.

Almost all interviewers look on the interview as an interaction with a student. They want to know who you are as an individual and not as the child of Mr. and Mrs._____. Keep in mind the purposes of the interview: for you to find out how you might fit into an institution and for you to present yourself as an individual and not just a number. Considering this, you should see that a one to one interview is the only way to accomplish these purposes. You will be the one attending classes. You will be the one living in the dorm. You will be the one finding your place in the freshman class. Therefore, you should be the one doing the talking and questioning.

Most interviewers are happy to meet your parents and answer questions they might have. The usual procedure is for the interviewer to walk you out to the waiting room at the end of the interview to meet your parents there. Depending on the time restriction, your parents might be invited into the office to chat or the interviewer might simply answer questions in the waiting room. In either case, not much time is allotted to this task, and your parents should not expect a re-run of the interview.

If you come to the admissions office alone, you will not be considered strange. In fact, your interviewer might be impressed by your independence. I always admired the maturity of students who arrived in a taxi, suitcase in hand, to confirm the time of their interview.

You may feel, however, that you want your parents with you, and certainly most parents will feel this way. After all, they are about to invest as much as $40,000 or more in this institution, and they would like to see what they are getting! This is, of course, understandable. If they do visit with you, my advice to you and your parents is for you to take charge of the visit with them remaining in the background as interested observers, not active participants. You should definitely take time to scout around on your own and ask questions of students. If you wish to sit-in on a class, do so alone. Do not put yourself in the embarrassing situation of showing up at the local

campus hang-out with your parents. Explain to them that you want some time to explore on your own. Campuses and college towns offer many diversions such as libraries, bookstores, and shops that are of interest to most parents. Send them off for a few hours to explore these things while you get a feel for the campus on your own.

There are many things that you can do comfortably with your parents while on campus. The tour is an excellent way for all of you to see the campus and ask questions. If one of your parents is an alumnus, you might want to visit the alumni organization together. Touring libraries, labs, and dorms can be done with your parents. Just remember that you will be the one attending in the fall so you should value your reactions as well as those of your parents.

A word of warning--if your parents are with you, treat them with respect in an adult manner. Introducing them to your interviewer as "my mommie and daddy," for example, does not create a sense of maturity. Do not try to ignore your parents either. Hopefully, you will be able to discuss their role in this endeavor with them and come to an agreement on their participation. But remember, because they have a great interest in you and your future, your college choice is very important to them. Think of your parents as advisors who can offer valuable information. You can sit down with them after each visit and compare reactions. Your reactions are important and theirs are important, too. Maturity does not mean rejecting your parents but viewing them with respect as adults.

What to Wear

Dressing for success has become a key phrase in employment interviewing. Everyone wants to know exactly what color suit to wear, and some books go into the minutest detail such as what type of pen to use or umbrella to carry on an employment interview. Clothes are not quite that crucial for your college interview, but you certainly should consider your wardrobe carefully.

Many employment interviewing books tell you that you should research the firm (or in your case, the college) and wear what most employees wear. This is not the case for the college inter-

view. Most campuses are populated with students in cut-offs, warm up suits, and jeans. None of these choices would be appropriate for your interview. You need to consider to whom you will be speaking and in what environment. The interviewer is most likely an administrator and the place is undoubtedly a formal office setting. You will feel very out of place in this situation dressed informally. This is an official encounter, and your dress should reflect your seriousness of purpose.

You do not, on the other hand, have to show up in a three piece suit for every interview. You probably have some clothes that are appropriate for slightly formal occasions such as church. These would work well for the interview. Men do not have to wear a suit to every interview, but you should consider the school in this decision. The Ivy League schools are more formal than the west coast schools. In any event, a dress shirt and slacks are called for. Women should consider a dress, skirt and blouse, or nice pants. Also, unless you are fully committed to the statement it makes, omit your newest fad jewelry or hairstyle. Keep in mind that what you are wearing and the way you look says a lot about who you are to an observer. We all make assumptions based on nonverbal communication.

You should take along some casual clothes for touring the campus. This is a time when you will be better off looking like the other students. If you want to talk to students informally, it will help if you do not look like a high school student on campus for an interview. Again, avoid the embarrassment of sitting in on a class or stopping for a sandwich in the student union dressed in your three piece suit. Come preparaed to present yourself as two students: the one participating in the official interview, and the one who will be a student on campus in a few months. You will soon discover that college students fine tune these dual roles when coping first with classes and then with work or an internship. Many carry their "dress for success" clothes with them in their cars or backpacks in order to change when the need arises. You would be wise to make the same arrangements so that you are dressed appropriately for all occasions.

Where to Stay

The admissions office can assist you with your decision of where to stay overnight. Most offices have prepared lists of hotels and motels in the vicinity of campus. These will vary in cost and services, but they will provide easy access to campus.

Your best choice of a place to stay, however, is in a dormitory. Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that many colleges make this choice available, especially in the summer months, and the admissions office will be able to tell you if this is a possibility. During the summer, your parents can often stay in the dorm also, but be sure to inquire about this when making your interview appointment. In the fall, you might be able to arrange a room for yourself, but your parents would probably have to find other lodging.

If the admissions office does not offer information about staying in a dorm, you might ask your high school guidance counselor or an alumnus if there are students from your area you could contact at a particular school. Experiencing dorm life will give you a real feeling of what a campus is like. You will have an excellent opportunity to chat informally with students, and you may learn as much from this as from any other activity you experience while visiting. You might need to take along a sleeping bag, but the added effort and inconvenience it takes to try to stay in a dorm are well worth it. (If you are staying with a dorm resident, remember to send a thank you note after your stay. Most students open their rooms on a volunteer basis, and you should be grateful for their cooperation.)

Arriving on Campus

When the big day of your visit arrives and you are finally on campus, you should check-in with the admissions office first. If you need to pick up a campus map or tour schedule, you might want to go by the office to do this. In any case, you will want to telephone to confirm your appointment. In addition, you will want to locate the office prior to your interview time.

Nothing makes a worse impression than showing up late for an interview whether it is an employment or campus interview. Professionals do not accept excuses like, "I thought your building was on the other side of campus," or "I couldn't find

a parking place," or "My bus was late." It is simply understood that you will be there on time or that you will call and reschedule your appointment. Keep in mind that if you are late, not only will you lose some of your interview time, but your tardiness will undoubtedly be mentioned in your interview report. You should, therefore, make all the preparations necessary to be on time.

Definitely find the admissions office prior to your interview and mark it on your campus map. Also, plan your method of transportation and check on how long it will take by bus, car, or taxi. If you are driving yourself, inquire about where to park and how difficult it will be to find a place.

You should plan to arrive in the admissions office for your interview at least 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment. This will give you time to check-in with the receptionist and compose yourself. You may also be given a form to fill out prior to your interview. Running in right on time puts you at a disadvantage. You do not want to be short of breath and disorganized during the opening minutes of your interview. As you will find out in the next chapter, these first few minutes are the most important. All of your carefully planned pre-interview preparation can be wasted if you are not looking and feeling your best when you meet your interviewer. You want to feel as relaxed as possible for the stages of the interview that will develop during the next 30 minutes.

# 4

# The Interview--What to Expect

When students research employment interviewing, they are usually shocked to find that most books agree that it is in the first few minutes of an employment interview when the employer makes up his or her mind to hire a person or not. Books vary in the specific length of time, but the first three or four minutes are ultimately important. As a potential college interviewee, you can learn from this information and apply the knowledge in your admissions interview.

Nonverbal communication is the main factor in a first impression. When meeting someone, we all make a definite statement before we ever open our mouths. Our dress says something, as do our hair styles, posture, and handshake. As an interviewee, you should be conscious of all these nonverbal factors.

In the preceeding chapter, dress and hair style were discussed. The basic thing to remember is that this is a reasonably formal occasion so you should look your best. Slightly formal attire and your neatest appearance will make a good impression. In terms of posture and handshake, you want to try to convey your enthusiasm and interest. Slouching down on the couch in the waiting room, sauntering over to your interviewer and giving a weak handshake hardly give the impression of an interested applicant who will strive for excellence if admitted. You would surely not make these blatant mistakes, but you should be conscious of nonverbal messages you are conveying.

To make the best first impression, you should decide how you would like to be perceived and go about constructing that image

in your dress, hair style, handshake, and general demeanor. Remember that your interviewer is sizing you up the first minute you come into view. You can make a good first impression by approaching your interviewer with confidence and offering a firm handshake. This might occur in the waiting room if your interviewer comes out to greet you, or in the office if the receptionist takes you in. In either setting, remember the importance of the first few minutes.

Opening the Interview

Once the introductions have been made, your interviewer will begin the cliche level conversation which usually opens the interview. In most interpersonal communication situations, we break the ice by chatting about the weather, a recent sports event, or anything of general interest. I had a foreign student say to me once that Americans have a great gift for talking about nothing well. The cliche conversation that opens the interview tests this skill. Do not be surprised if your interviewer asks you about your trip to campus or if it is hot enough for you! This is the time to break the ice and relax a bit in each others company. Cliche level conversation accomplishes this task.

Do try to relax during the opening of the interview and be yourself as much as possible. This does not mean, however, that you should launch into a twenty minute impromptu speech on your feelings about the last Superbowl! Make a few comments and leave the conversation open for the interviewer to move on to the body of the interview.

Body of the Interview

This part of the interview is the most difficult to predict because it is structured differently by every interviewer. Since an interview is a human communication encounter, no two are ever the same. The way the body of the interview progresses depends on the skill and experience of the interviewer as well as the responsiveness of the interviewee. There are, however, some predictable stages.

The body of the interview usually consists of three stages: questions about you, questions about why you think this school is best for you, and questions you yourself may wish to ask.

Your interviewer will lead you into one of these stages with a question once he or she feels you are comfortable and ready to get down to a more serious discussion.

Stage One - Many times the questions about you provide a transition from the cliche opening conversation. These questions may begin as rather general ones such as, "How long have you lived in the New York area?" They may then proceed to more probing questions that will allow the interviewer to ease you into a deeper discussion with progressively more difficult questions.

Be prepared, however, for any type of question to open the body of the interview. Some interviewers like to test your skills by hitting you with a difficult question right off the bat. You might be asked, for example, what book has influenced your thinking the most, or if you were President how would you improve our country. Do not let a difficult question catch you off guard. If your first question is one that requires careful construction, do not be afraid to pause while you organize your thoughts. You might want to use the stalling technique of saying, "That's a good question and one that requires some thought." This will give you time to organize your answer. Always keep in mind, however, that a difficult question in an interview is testing your ability to keep your cool and answer intelligently. Generally what you say is not as important as how you handle the question. The interviewer will be looking for your level of maturity and your ability to react under stress. Try not to panic, but simply put together the best answer you can.

You can relax in the thought that most interviewers do not conduct stress interviews. They may ask one or two probing questions, but their goal is usually to make the interview experience as enjoyable for you as possible. Questions will usually progress from relatively easy ones about you and your background to more probing inquiries into your thoughts and opinions. Judith M. Tindel, Director of Admissions at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta puts it this way: "Be prepared to respond to questions from the interviewer about school, extracurricular activities, and future goals." This advice outlines the usual categories of questions. Most admissions directors

want to hear you talk intelligently about the things you know best.

Just because most of the questions asked will be relatively easy does not mean, however, that you should go into a college admissions interview with the same mental preparation you employ when striking up a conversation with someone at a party. The interviewer expects that you will have given some thought to your future goals. This should not be the first time you have contemplated what you would like to be doing after college. Jane H. Percy, Associate Director of Admissions, Smith College, suggests that you "Think of ways (and words) to describe interests, strengths, long-range goals." You will most certainly receive one or more questions about your interests and ambitions for the future, so spend some preparation time discussing these with friends and family so that the words will come easily to you in the interview situation. Consult Appendix B for a list of sample questions that progresses from the obvious ones about your background to the probing ones that require more thought. Use these to conduct mock interviews with your friends and family and let them critique your responses.

It might also comfort you to know that most of the questions you will be asked have no right or wrong answers. The interviewer is looking for your individual opinions and responses that reflect who you are. You are not taking an oral exam when you participate in an interview. The interviewer is interested in discovering your thought processes and observing your communication skills, not in passing or failing you on your opinion of the best contemporary novel. Your answers should show the interviewer that you have thought about your goals, your future, and the world around you, and that you can talk about these subjects with a degree of sophistication.

The only area of discussion that might come up in which there are some right or wrong answers is current events. This is an area that does require some knowledge other than your personal opinions, and this knowledge may be important to your success in the interview. Few interviewers quiz applicants on the nation's economic policy or world events, but if you are so out of touch with the world around you that you do not know who the Vice President is, you may find yourself in an embar-

rassing situation. Staying current on what is happening in the world is important and reading a weekly news magazine like Newsweek or Time will help you with your interviews as well as assist in preparing you for college-level work.

Stage Two - Within the body of the interview, questions will usually arise about why you are considering this school and what you feel the school has to offer you. This is the point at which your research about the college is important.

You may have noticed that the stages of the interview that have been outlined do not include time for the interviewer to give you an oration on his college and what it has to offer. Most interviewers presume you already know this and that you have done your homework prior to showing up in the admissions office. If you have not read up on the school, you might be caught off-guard when asked why you have decided that Amherst's English department offers you the most as an English major. As Chapter 3 explained, you should know the basic information about every school to which you apply, and if you have done this homework, you should be comfortable answering questions about what you feel each school has to offer you.

Richard A. Silverman, Associate Director of Admissions, Yale College, outlines very clearly how preparation on the part of the interviewee can benefit both participants in the interview:

> Interviews seem most productive for all concerned if the student is at least superficially well-informed about the college and campus, by reading college guides or the information bulletin published by the college itself. This bit of "homework" allows the interview to get beyond the level of a trivia-exchange, and to become a more interesting and substantial conversation.

If you put yourself in the role of the interviewer, you can understand how boring it would be to explain the same information over and over again to each applicant. Viewbooks and catalogues are published to alleviate this repetition in the interview so that your time with the admissions representative can move beyond the basic information level.

Stage Three - The last part of the body of the interview usually involves your questions for the interviewer. Occasionally, an interviewer will ask for questions earlier, but most use

this as a way of concluding the main part of the interview. You should prepare general questions in advance for all the schools where you are interviewing, and you should think of specific questions for each school. Having these written down will give you some security, but you should be familiar enough with your questions that you do not have to read them. Use your list of questions as a checklist to be sure you do not omit an important question.

When structuring your questions, remember that you should not ask anything that you could find in a printed source. You want to show your interviewer that you have researched the college and that you can put together insightful questions based on your research. In college admissions interviews, and employment interviews as well, many interviewers judge their applicants by the quality of the questions they ask. Do not pass up this opportunity to make a good impression. Spend some time thinking about each school and constructing good, probing questions.

Keep in mind that your interviewer is quite biased in favor of the college where he or she is employed, and you may not get as honest an answer from the interviewer as you might get from a college student. Do not, however, let this prevent you from asking the interviewer's opinions about certain aspects of the college. Thomas S. Anthony, Associate Dean of Admission, Colgate University, suggests that students, "Ask questions that deal with the impact of college life on them--what it's like--what are the good and bad things." This is good advice, and it points out the fact that admissions people expect to be asked the good and the bad. Do not limit your questions to the good things about a college. Inquire about the problems and pressures as well.

It should be noted that not all questions are appropriate in an interview. There are some types of questions that will definitely work against you and should be avoided.

Do not ask your interviewer to evaluate another college. A question like, "How do you think your computer science department compares with the one at Carnegie-Mellon?" puts the interviewer in an awkward position. In addition, few admissions representatives will criticize their own school. The question would waste time and leave the interviewer with a bad impression.

You should also avoid asking questions that are constructed with the sole intent of impressing your interviewer. Asking if their communication department stresses a phenomenological approach to interpersonal communication can get you into trouble if you do not know the fine points of phenomenology. Keep your questions honest and on your level of expertise.

Shallow questions also work against you since they may indicate your priorities when thinking of college. "Are the parties good here?" or "Do I get unlimited cuts in most classes?" portrays you in a rather negative way to admissions directors. They are looking for candidates who will excel academically once admitted, and anything that indicates you might not fit into that category will certainly be noted in your file.

When constructing your questions for the interviewer, you might want to consider probing into some of the following areas:

The average teaching load for a full professor;
The utilization of student teaching assistants;
The average class size;
Accessibility to computers;
Campus organizations that have a strong impact on college policy;
Dorm life;
The acceptance of sororities and fraternities on campus;
The difficulty of getting into classes when registering;
The acceptance of minorities on campus;
The availability of internships or co-op plans in the professional world;
The opportunity to study abroad.

Asking questions in any of these areas will indicate to your interviewer that you have thought beyond the basic level about attending college. You will be probing into areas that many students never think about until their freshman year.

It is also a good idea to construct a few questions that involve your possible major area. If, for example, you plan to study broadcasting, inquire about the equipment available and whether you will get hands-on experience. If you are going into the sciences, it would be a good idea to ask about

lab equipment and the hours the labs are open. These types of questions will show a certain level of expertise in your area of interest. Prepare these questions in advance, and ask them at every college interview.

You will not have a great deal of time to ask questions, so you do not need to prepare very many. I would suggest you ask a couple of general questions and one or two about your major. You should also think of ways to connect your questions so that they do not sound like four unrelated inquiries. You might preface your questions, for example, by saying that you are especially interested in campus life or in the availability of teachers. This will give your questions some connection so that they can flow easily into one another.

Once you have asked three or four questions and had them answered to your satisfaction, you should tell the interviewer that you do not have any more questions. Remember that the interviewer's time is valuable, and you should not ask questions just for the sake of extending the interview. Use the question and answer time to ask your most important questions and seek answers for any that remain from other people you might talk to on campus.

Closing the Interview

Interviews usually last approximately 30 minutes, and the time limit ordinarily signals the end of the interview. Your interviewer will thank you for coming, and you should return the thanks. Be specific in your gratitude and practice your thank you before you go to interview. You might say, "I want to thank you, Ms._____, for giving me so much of your time today and for telling me about _____College." A phrase such as this is much more effective than a mumbled, "thanks."

It is also advisable to ask your interviewer for one of his or her business cards before you leave the office. Most interviewers have cards readily available and feel comfortable giving them out. Asking for a business card shows your interviewer that you are interested in him or her as a person, and it also gives you their name and address for future correspondence. This will be helpful to you when you get back home.

Your interviewer will usually walk you back out to the waiting room at the conclusion of the interview. If your parents are there and if you have not done so already, you should introduce your interviewer to your parents. Make this an official introduction and not a casual reference to mom and dad. Use the interviewer's name and your parents' names so that they can call each other by name when talking. As Chapter 3 points out, your parents should have been advised by you that if they have questions they should keep them short since there is probably another applicant waiting to talk to your interviewer.

As you are leaving the admissions office, you should retain your composed manner. This is not the time to jump up and down to celebrate the fact that your interview went well. Wait until after you have left the office to discuss the interview with your parents. The interview is not over until you are out of eye and ear contact of your interviewer and the admissions office.

General Considerations

Now that you know what to expect in the interview, there are some general things you should consider.

First, as the interviewee, be advised that you should be the one who does most of the talking during the interview. This is true in an employment interview as well, and most books in that area say you should talk at least 70% of the time. This is also a good percentage for your college admissions interview. In order to talk 70% of the time, you must go into the interview with your energy level up and your preparation done. Fred F. Neuberger, the Director of Admissions at Middlebury College, says, "Be on time and be prepared to talk." If you are a shy person, you may have to force yourself to converse, but this is one time when it will be worth it. You are trying to make the best impression possible in your college admissions interview and talking is how you do that. An Assistant Director of Admissions at Columbia College advises, "Be prepared to talk . . . at length--interviewing is an active event; a student should not be pushy, but must not be passive either." Miriam Ivey, Assistant Regional Director, Princeton University, sums this up saying, "Speak up!! Don't sit there and expect the interviewer to do

all the talking! This happens too often and, needless to say, we are not left with a favorable impression." Talking intelligently is the best way to represent yourself in your interview. Even if you find it difficult, you should put forth a little extra effort to maintain good eye contact with your interviewer and be an active participant in the interview. Do not be afraid to talk about the things you do well since that is, after all, what the interviewer needs to hear.

Second, as you make every effort to participate effectively in your interview, you should also keep in mind that this should not become your acting debut. The interviewer wants to know you as you are and not as you think you should be to get into a particular school. Remember that you are looking for a perfect match between you and your college, and faking the interview may set you up for four miserable years. All your preparation should work to help you relax and let your own personality come through rather than making you appear to be something you are not.

If you read the comments given by admissions representatives in Chapter 6, you will notice a key phrase being repeated: "Be yourself." Wellesley, Rice, Oberlin, Yale, Vanderbilt, Johns Hopkins, and many others use these exact words when advising potential interviewees. The Director of Admissions at Barnard College, for instance, advises, "Be yourself. The interviewer wants to know something about you." The advice from Princeton University is, "Be Yourself! Don't act cool, smart or older than you are." It seems obvious that interviewers are looking for students who are comfortable talking and who can react honestly to questions. The preparation you do prior to your visit and your knowledge of what to expect during the interview should prepare you for a successful encounter. And what is a successful interview? Dean Henry E. Bedford of the Amherst College Admissions Office outlines it very well:

> Try to leave the interviewer with something that may not emerge from the application itself--not scores and data that the transcript or application will convey. In particular give some thought to ways that will enable you to display the qualities of mind (particularly) and personality that prose will not convey effectively.

# 5

# The Post-Interview Process

After your interview is over, you may feel like breathing a sigh of relief and getting back to your high school activities. There are, however, some important follow-up procedures that you need to complete.

As soon as possible after each interview, you should write down your reactions. Waiting even an hour or so might mean that you will forget an important part of the discussion. Your interviewer will undoubtedly be writing up the interview as soon as possible and putting down his or her reactions to you, and you should do the same. In addition to helping you remember what took place in the interview, a post-interview evaluation will help you build your strengths and eliminate your weaknesses in future interviews. Every interview you participate in should become a learning experience for other interviews you will encounter.

It is important to consider four things after each interview: your reactions to the interview, your reactions to your participation in the interview, any important topics of discussion that might be remembered by the interviewer, and your reactions to the campus itself as well as your general impressions of the college.

Appendix C provides a form that you may find helpful when reacting to each interview. You might want to duplicate the pages in Appendix C and put a set in each of your college folders. By doing this, you will have the form available to fill out immediately after each on-campus interview.

Reactions to the Interview

When considering your reactions to the interview, you should evaluate how you were treated by the interviewer and the other staff in the admissions office. The office represents the college, and, therefore, you can make some generalizations about the college based on your encounter with the admissions office. You should remember that your interviewer is only one person, however, and he or she may not be indicative of the entire admissions office or of the college. Occasionally a bad interview experience will change a student's mind about attending a particular school. This is a bit of an over-reaction. It is important to be treated well, but this is a human communication encounter and even a good interviewer can have a bad day. You should record your reactions, but do not think of your evaluation as a personality contest. If you feel your interviewer did a poor job, compare it with your other reactions from the campus visit before discounting the college altogether.

Since you know what to expect in an interview, you should be able to evaluate your interviewer with some degree of accuracy. If you do not feel that your questions were answered satisfactorily or that your interviewer did a good job, you might want to supplement your on-campus interview with an alumni interview (see Appendix A). This is especially true if you really like the school and feel that a good interview can help your acceptance possibilities.

Evaluation of Your Role in the Interview

If each interview is going to work as a learning experience, you need to evaluate your participation. Immediate reactions are important because the most vivid memories of how you felt in the interview will fade with time. You may forget, for example, that you could not stop playing with your watch during the interview. Simply realizing this and working to avoid it in future interviews is how you learn to be a better interviewee.

The questions in Appendix C outline the things you should consider when evaluating yourself. Basically, you should look at your nonverbal and verbal communication, your use of questions, and how you felt during the interview. Then you should consider what you might have changed or what you will try to

improve in the future. All of this will take only a few minutes, and this time is well spent since it may help you avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Important Topics of Discussion

Another important thing to record after an interview is any topic of discussion that was unique or that might stick in the mind of your interviewer. Remember that admissions interviewers may talk to as many as eight or ten students a day during the busy fall season. You want your interviewer to remember you, and referring to an interesting discussion you had during the interview will help. If you told your interviewer about the summer you spent hiking the Appalachian Trail or your part-time job as a gardener, you will want to refer to this in your thank you letter (discussed at the end of this chapter). You might also need to telephone your interviewer at some time, and mentioning your experience might help your interviewer put a face with your name. Also, when your application comes up for review, it will help a great deal if you are distinct in the mind of the admissions representative who talked with you. Finding some way to stand out from the crowd is important, and a good, memorable discussion that took place in your interview can provide the distinction you are seeking.

Reactions to the Campus Visit

Since your trip to campus has two goals, one to participate in your interview and the other to see the prospective school, it is important to record your feelings about the campus as well as the interview.

It is a good idea to react to a few general considerations such as housing, food, safety, etc., but you will probably have specific interests to consider. If you are interested in sports, for example, the athletic facilities will be important. A musician will want to see the practice rooms. Your individual needs should dictate your reactions, and you should write down anything that seems important to you.

You should also jot down any comments made by college students that you remember. If you visit five or six colleges, you may forget which student said that the freshman classes are all

taught by teaching assistants and not faculty members. In addition, it may be six or eight months before you are faced with the decision of which school to accept and at that time you will want to review all your notes on each school. Do not trust your memory. A quick list of the student reactions you received written on the spot can help you keep all the comments with the correct college so that you will have them for future reference.

You should think of the post-interview evaluation procedure as a way to compile a data bank on each college you are considering. Reading all the college publications gives you what the college wants you to know. The interview trip is your chance to investigate what you want to know. In some ways you are working as a detective attempting to uncover all the information you can that will help you decide if a particular college is right for you. Keeping a written record of your reactions is an important part of your investigation.

The Thank You Letter

If you really like a college and are hoping for admission, you will want to use every possible means you can to distinguish yourself before your application comes up for review. This might be one reason for following your visit with a thank you letter, but, actually, the thank you letter should become an automatic follow-up procedure for any interview. Everyone's time is valuable, and any time a person gives you an official interview they deserve more than just a verbal thanks. You should develop a habit of sending a thank you letter after any interview.

The admissions directors from Vanderbilt University and Barnard College both mention the importance of a thank you note in their comments on the questionnaire they returned (see Chapter 6). In addition, Gordon D. Chavis, Jr. of Georgetown University reports that he considers a thank you letter very important and is surprised that only about 25% of the students he interviews send one. Every contact you have with an admissions office is important, and the thank you letter gives you an additional means of communication. You should take advantage of this chance to correspond with your interviewer.

In order to send a thank you letter, you will need the name and address of your interviewer. If you remembered to ask for

a business card, you will have all the needed information on the card. If you did not get a card, it is permissible to call the appointment secretary and request the name and address of your interviewer after the interview. Do not ask to speak to your interviewer as it will be a bit awkward when you have to explain your reason for calling. The secretary should be able to give you all the information you need.

Your thank you letter does not need to be long and involved. In fact, it should only be a paragraph or two. Since everything you send to a college admissions office usually ends up in your file, however, it is a good idea to type your letter or hand write it neatly. Be sure that your grammar and spelling are correct as well. As advised earlier, you might want to refer to something distinctive that your interviewer might recall about you. This will remind your interviewer of you as a person and not just a name.

Here is a sample letter to give you an idea of what you might say.

> Dear Ms. Ryan:
>
> I want to thank you for talking with me last Thursday. It was so helpful to have my questions answered by a member of the admissions staff at Culver College.
>
> I especially appreciated the extra time you took to arrange for me to tour the photography darkroom area. As I told you, I do hope to continue expanding my hobby of photographing nature into a possible career. Seeing the facilities at Culver College was most helpful, and I know that your college would provide a good program of study in my area of interest.
>
> Thank you again for all your assistance.
>
> Sincerely,

A letter such as this one not only works as a thank you, but it also reminds the interviewer who you are and emphasizes how much you liked the college. Remember, though, that even if you were not too impressed with the college or your interviewer, you owe them the courtesy of a thank you letter.

# 6

# Advice From Admissions Officers

Now that you know what to expect in your college admissions interview and how to prepare and follow-up your visit, you may be wishing you had something that would give you that extra edge for a successful interview. You may be thinking that if you could only hear a bit of special advice from admissions directors themselves, maybe you could find out the inside story on exactly what to do. Well, the quotations that follow will provide what you are looking for.

The final section of the questionnaire mailed to one hundred colleges asked, "What advice would you give students preparing to interview?" The forty-six responses that follow are the best answers received, and they are quoted directly from the questionnaires. They represent state and private colleges all across the country, and their advice touches on every aspect of the admissions interview. This material has been a great help in the research for this book, and you have already read many of the quotations that have been integrated into the preceeding chapters. All of the advice is helpful, however, and what better way to end your preparation for interviewing then to hear what the interviewers themselves have to say.

Agnes Scott College (Georgia)

1. Become familiar in advance with the college at which you are interviewing by reading the literature and/or college guides.

2. Take to the interview or forward a complete transcript so that the interviewer can make recommendations about curriculum and standardized tests or discuss realistically your chances for admission.

3. Be prepared to respond to questions from the interviewer about school, extracurricular activities, and future goals.

4. Have in mind a solid list of questions to ask the interviewer.

5. Relax. Listen attentively to the interviewer. Respond to questions with warmth and animation in a succinct manner.

Amherst College (Massachusetts)

Try to leave the interviewer with something that may not emerge from the application itself--not scores and data that the transcript or application will convey. In particular give some thought to ways that will enable you to display the qualities of mind (particularly) and personality that prose will not convey effectively.

University of Arkansas

Explore the intent of interviews at the colleges or universities that they wish to attend. Be inquisitive themselves--asking questions that they want answered, rather than merely responding to questions. Prepare by writing up a biography and clarifying one's own reasons for (1) choosing to go to college, (2) choosing that college.

Barnard College (New York)

1. Know as much as possible about the college to which you are considering applying (from admissions viewbooks and brochures, the college catalogue, college guides, etc.).

2. Go armed with intelligent questions; avoid general questions which could have been answered by some preliminary research.

3. Be prepared to talk about the things that interest you or matter to you most. Carry the ball if it is tossed to you. Respond to questions put to you as fully as possible. Be interested and interesting.

4. Be yourself. The interviewer wants to know something about you and can easily spot attempts to "make an impression."

5. Present yourself in a manner appropriate to an interview situation. Being natural doesn't mean abandoning decorum. Dress neatly, mind your manners, and exhibit as much poise as you can muster.

6. Be aware that interview techniques can vary from college to college, ranging from an aggressive testing of your mettle to a friendly, comfortable chat. Be alert to the approach your interviewer is taking and keep your cool under any circumstances.

7. Relax.

8. Write a note thanking your interviewer for seeing you. (Be sure to ask and remember his/her name.)

Bennington (Vermont)

Be relaxed; try not to rehearse; answer questions reasonably and fairly; try not to hide your real self.

Bowdoin (Maine)

know yourself well
evaluate your attitudes/opinions
evaluate the college to be interviewed
be yourself

Brandeis University (Massachusetts)

Be candid, honest and prepared. Think about what you've done, what you want and what you think. Know about the school you're visiting. Don't ask "How many books in your library?"

Brown University (Rhode Island)

1. A student should do enough research to ask probing questions about a particular college or university. These should be the type of inquiries not easily found in standard college publications.

2. A student should be prepared to talk at length about him or herself.

Bucknell University (Pennsylvania)

Give considerable thought to the interviewing process. Prepare for it in advance; read the literature and formulate questions and concerns which are important to you. It is an opportunity for the student to make a measurement of that college or university, and also an opportunity for the college or university to personalize what can be a very impersonal decision making process.

University of California--Berkeley

1. That they know something about the institution where they are interviewing and its requirements for admission.

2. That if their parents insist on being present, the applicant do the interview and their parents take a temporary vow of silence.

3. That they have some realistic idea of their goals, not that they have to have the rest of their lives and careers on some kind of irreversable timetable. The prospective applicants I find most appealing are those with some general goals and interests that leave room for several options and even reverses. Those I find least appealing are those who leave the impression that my school is but a brief detour on their upward path toward being the corporate executive or even President of the United States. I think they may overlook the opportunity of personal growth within the educational experience.

Carnegie-Mellon University (Pennsylvania)

As published in our admissions materials, ". . . an interview is strongly recommended. During your interview you will be able to discuss your educational objectives with a member of the admissions staff and to ask questions about entrance requirements, programs of study, financial aid, and undergraduate life. The interview will also help the admissions staff to personalize its appraisal of you."

"The Admissions process is designed to identify potential for success in the CMU programs. Each college (5 colleges offer undergraduate programs) has special admissions criteria specifically related to the intended course of study. In general, we feel that past scholastic performance gives us the most meaningful indication of whether or not CMU is a suitable choice for you. College Board scores add to our knowledge of your abilities. Your non-academic activities may be a clue to personality, motivation, and social adjustment and commitment to positive values. The interview may help us to determine your awareness of our academic programs and the nature of the university and its campus life, as well as some personal contact to our admissions evaluation."

"You must understand that no one single grade factor or score will 'automatically' gain or preclude admission to CMU. You should be aware of all admissions requirements, secondary school preparation, audition/portfolio/interview requirements, standardized test requirements, and admissions interview and recommendations requested when submitting the application."

Colgate University (New York)

Ask questions that deal with the impact of college life on them--what it's like--what are the good and bad things. Don't ask "How good is your. . ." it begs the answer. Don't ask a question that can be answered with a number.

Columbia College (New York)

Familiarize him/herself with college publications; think about why they find a particular college desirable; evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses; try not to think of the interview as a performance; make a list of questions they would like to have answered (again, authentic, not contrived questions); be prepared to talk about him/herself at length--interviewing is an active event; a student should not be pushy, but must not be passive either.

DePauw University (Indiana)

1. Come prepared with a basic knowledge of the school (read in advance!),

2. Bring unofficial transcript if official transcript has not already been mailed to the college.

3. Prepare list of important questions in advance.

Duke University (North Carolina)

I would recommend that the student look at the interview as an opportunity to let admissions officers get to know him or her as a person. The student should try to relax, answer questions as they come rather than attempting to anticipate questions and coming prepared to dominate. If the student sees the interview as an opportunity to learn about and evaluate the college, he or she is likely to approach it in a positive frame of mind.

Furman University (South Carolina)

Think about the interview in advance. Determine the questions that should be asked and write them down if necessary.

Ask about the nature of the interview (amount of time, etc.) when making the appointment. Don't take things for granted. Be on time.

Georgia State University

Be honest, have questions prepared, don't be nervous because interviews are to determine the appropriateness of the student for the institution.

Harvard/Radcliffe (Massachusetts)

A good night's rest . . . A knowledge of the school's catalogue . . . A walk around campus before the interview to get a feel for the school and perhaps a basis for questions.

Finally, a knowledge as to why they are interested in the school and what they have to offer the school.

University of Iowa

To read the informational literature of the institution including major fields which they may be exploring. Subsequently, to formulate questions which are not answered in the literature or which assist them with interpretation.

Johns Hopkins University (Maryland)

1. Relax.

2. Be prepared to talk about yourself, your interests, and future goals and your interest in the institution.

3. Be honest.

4. Be yourself.

University of Kansas

The purpose of our on-campus visit is to provide a forum for the exchange of information between the applicant and the school official. Our primary emphasis is to acquaint the student with the academic programs and facilities available so that he/she can make an informed decision. In making the final admissions decisions on students, credentials are most important. However, the campus visit can provide supplemental information regarding extenuating circumstances for "borderline" students. I would advise students to approach the visit with curiosity, enthusiasm, and questions.

Kentucky Wesleyan

1. Be familiar with school and its programs.

2. Be on time.

3. Make an appointment one week in advance.

4. Have scores and transcript sent in advance (don't waste a visit on a school that may not admit you).

University of Maine at Augusta

I believe it is best for applicants not to do detailed, advanced preparation. Interviews work best when they are open-ended and unstructured.

Mary Baldwin College (Virginia)

Be prepared with questions.
Know something about the college before your interview.
Be prepared for questions.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

1. Dress as though you care about yourself--unless you don't.

2. Be prepared to show some interest in the life and times and context of the interviewer--unless you have none.

3. Give some thought to that part of your life you find most exciting so you can speak about it.

4. Superfluous*--don't get too tight about the whole matter. The tighter, more controlled you are, the harder it will be for you and the interviewer to get to know each other. Remember: you're an amateur applicant; he/she is probably an amateur interviewer.

5. Be cool* but not bored!

*I know it's hard not to be nervous, but perhaps awareness of the fact that the interview is not a test of some kind will help generate "cool."

Middlebury College (Vermont)

Be on time and be prepared to talk. Too many students assume that their role will be to respond to the interviewer's questions--have questions of your own!

University of Minnesota, Morris

Think through future goals prior to interview.

Mount Holyoke College (Massachusetts)

1. Think about her strongest interests and talents.

2. Goals, purposes and aims for attending liberal arts school.

3. Bring high school transcript or other useful information.

4. Be prepared to ask questions--be knowledgeable about basic factual information on the college.

University of New Hampshire

Attend the interview with some knowledge of the particular institution.

City College of New York (CUNY)

An interview at City College is used in cases when a student has been rejected by the college. A strong case presented by the student will influence us to possibly admit him/her.

North Texas State University

Be able to explain what his/her reasons are for wanting to pursue a college education (goals).
Reasons for wanting to attend the university.
Why they feel that they are prepared at this time for university study.
Relax and be honest.

Northwestern University (Illinois)

Prepare questions to ask interviewer.
Dress neatly.
Be on time.
Read some materials in advance before the interview about the college, so you can ask intelligent questions.

Oberlin College (Ohio)

Prepare, as in reading catalogue.
Relax.
Be yourself.
Ask good questions.

Princeton University (New Jersey)

1. Be prepared to talk about yourself: interests, both academic and non-academic; family background; etc.

2. Learn as much about the university as possible. Ask questions!!

3. Be yourself! Don't act cool, smart or older than you are.

4. Speak up! Don't sit there and expect the interviewer to do all the talking! This happens too often and, needless to say, we are not left with a favorable impression.

University of Rhode Island

1. Find out in advance if an interview is required.

2. Don't expect the interviewer to entertain you--you should take charge, ask intelligent questions, and have a purpose for being there--don't try to brown-nose!

Rice University (Texas)

Be yourself.
Know something about the institution--do your homework!
Ask questions.

Rutgers - The State University of New Jersey

Be as knowledgeable as possible about the institution.

Smith College (Massachusetts)

1. Prepare: read college literature beforehand and prepare good, informed questions.

2. Think of ways (and words) to describe interests, strengths, long-range goals.

3. Relax and enjoy a worthwhile learning experience!

Univerisity of South Dakota

Interviews are of importance when the applicant does not qualify for regular admission. In those cases, the student's motivation and desire to attend are taken into account.

Vanderbilt University (Tennessee)

1. Read college materials in advance of interview.

2. Prepare questions.

3. Be natural/be yourself.

4. Dress appropriately and neatly.

5. Practice eye contact, firm handshake.

6. Be punctual.

7. Follow-up with a thank-you note.

Vassar College (New York)

Think about the school they are applying to, and formulate some questions about areas of interest.

Think about themselves--their academic and extracurricular interests, their high school experience, their goals for college. We aren't interested in pre-formulated speeches, but these are the subjects we hope to discuss, and if the student has given these subjects a little thought s/he may feel more comfortable discussing them.

University of Vermont

Know the school you are visiting well enough to discuss it intelligently.
Know yourself and recognize your strengths.
Realize that the interviewer will have biases and moods just as you do.
Try to be aware of the person across from you.

University of Virginia

Do some underground research on the institution.
Prepare some questions in advance.
Don't be nervous; interviewers are usually nice people.

Wellesley College (Massachusetts)

Read the literature about the college.
Self-evaluate your interests and priorities--academic and otherwise.
Be prepared to ask questions which indicate your area of interest and enthusiasm.
Be yourself--don't over-prepare.

Wesleyan University (Connecticut)

Students preparing to interview ought to know something about the school where they are interviewing. They can read the Admissions Bulletin, take a campus tour and talk with current students. They should think about their ideas related to education and assess themselves as students and people in a community. The interviewer is looking for a match between the institution and the student. It helps if the student recognizes one. Every interview will be different so the best preparation is for the student to do the above and then relax and trust their genuine responses.

The best interview occurs when the student will engage the interviewer in conversation. It indicates that he or she is willing to be an active participant. I am most impressed by students who can develop a line of thought, who demonstrate quickness, humor and a sense of a larger world. I am unimpressed by excessive self-involvement or narrow-mindedness.

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Since we interview students not meeting admission requirements to determine other indicators of possible success, we find it important that the student:

1. Be able to express why he/she wishes to attend--what is motivating the person to want college and be successful.

2. Have some idea of what interest areas person has and may wish to pursue in college.

3. What other options has the student investigated.

4. Has the person even read the admissions criteria.

Yale University (Connecticut)

Interviews seem most productive for all concerned if the student is at least superficially well-informed about the college and campus, by reading college guides, or the information bulletin published by the college itself. This bit of "homework" allows the interview to get beyond the level of trivia-exchange, and to become a more interesting and substantial conversation. Other "preparation" is probably best left to the judgment of the student--It is probably good advice to "be yourself" in the interview, to ask and answer questions in as honest and spontaneous a way as possible in a situation which is inevitably artificial (at best) and filled with anxiety (at worst). Don't try to "impress" the interviewer; just have a good, engaged conversation; and the "impressions" will take care of themselves. One bit of wisdom: Be on time!

# Appendix A
# Other Types of Interviews

The primary emphasis of this book has been the official, on-campus interview, but there are several other ways that an interview might become a part of your college search. The three most significant are: College Nights or Fairs, the pre-application trip to campus, and alumni interviews.

College Nights or Fairs

When admissions directors come to your city or town it is usually to participate in an official function such as a College Night at your school or a College Fair in your community. They might also come to your high school to meet with students for an information sharing session. At any of these events, you have the opportunity to talk with admissions directors face to face. It may take some perseverance on your part to stand around until the director is free to talk to you, but it can be worth the effort.

College Nights and College Fairs usually involve from 50-300 college representatives. In the Washington, D.C., area, for example, there are several Fairs held around the metropolitan area with 100 or more college representatives at each. There is also a National College Fair held in Washington with over 300 colleges attending. Most of these events are conducted in large meeting areas such as an auditorium or gymnasium, and colleges set up booths staffed by their representatives. These representatives may be directors from the admissions office or alumni volunteers. In either case, the person in each booth is

knowledgeable about the college and comes armed with a variety of literature to give out.

College Nights or Fairs offer an excellent opportunity for you to gather a lot of information about many different colleges at one time. This is especially helpful when you first begin thinking about college. Since these events are open to the public, you can go any time during your high school years. Most events include evening hours so you can attend with your parents if you like. If you are a freshman or sophomore and have already begun to think about your future college choice, these events offer you a chance to get information even though you are not ready to apply. If you attend one of these functions as a junior or senior, you will want to do more than simply pick up information. Because admissions representatives are there to talk to you, you should look on this as an opportunity to interact with the representative.

If you are a junior and have limited your college choices to several schools, you should talk to a representative from each of your choices if they are available. Prepare good questions before going to the Fair and have the patience to wait until each representative can talk with you without too many interruptions. Make it clear to the representative that you plan to apply to that school and wish to get more information. Let them know you have more than a casual interest in their college. This provides an excellent opportunity to get some direct answers that will broaden your knowledge about the colleges you are considering attending. Equally as important as the information you gain is the experience you will get from interacting with a college representative. This will be good preparation for your official, on-campus interviews in which you will participate later.

Once you have applied to your college choices, College Nights and Fairs give you a chance to get to know another representative from the admissions office at each of your selected colleges. If, for example, your first choice is a highly competitive college and you know they will be represented at a local Fair, take the time to go and introduce yourself. Voice your interest in their school and ask some good questions. You should approach this encounter with seriousness employing your best interviewing techniques (see

Chapter 3). Do not hang around the booth or take up too much of the representative's time but give your name and try to make a positive impression. Even if you have already interviewed on campus, meeting the representative in your community will mean that one more voting member of the admissions committee will know who you are. In addition, you will have one more chance to get a feeling of how you might fit into this college environment.

If you find a representative especially helpful, be sure to ask for a business card. This will give you the name and address of the representative so that you can send a thank you note as a follow-up to your meeting (see Chapter 5). If you have not already gone to the campus to interview, you might want to ask to say hello to that representative when you are at the college admissions office. Remember, the more people you meet from the college, the better picture you will have of the school and the better chance you will have of being remembered when your application comes up for review.

In addition to College Nights and Fairs, admissions representatives also visit individual high schools across the country every year. These visits are usually in the fall, and they are structured by the particular high school. Some high schools get so many requests for visits by colleges that they make a room or booth available for colleges to use and announce visits over the public address system. Other schools arrange more formal group interview sessions for which students must register.

Whatever approach your high school employs for college visitors, with a little effort you can make this encounter a meaningful one. Much like College Nights or Fairs, you may have to be patient and exert a little extra effort, but you can use this opportunity as a way to get to know more about a college.

If your high school employs the more casual walk-up booth arrangement, the advice for making the most of this situation is the same as for a College Fair. Prepare good questions and distinguish yourself as someone with a sincere interest in the college. Waiting until you can talk directly to the representative even if it means missing your lunch will be worth the effort.

A more positive situation usually occurs when a time is reserved for a visit by each college and you attend with other

students who have signed up. Depending on the size of the group attending, you may be able to talk at length to the representative. In this situation, admissions representatives have told me that they often remember particular students who asked good questions and interacted well. Representatives take notes on outstanding students and these comments may become part of your application file. Because of this, you should do some research about each college before their representative comes to your high school. If you are interested in the college, go into their session as prepared as you would for an on-campus visit. Follow the advice in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 and do not waste this opportunity to interact with a college representative.

Pre-application Trip to Campus

Visiting campuses is always the most direct way to see what colleges are really like. You do not, however, have to limit your visits to the five or six colleges to which you finally make application. Many families begin to include college visits in their summer vacation plans when their children are freshmen or sophomores in high school. These visits offer an opportunity to see different campuses and to collect college information that will be helpful as the senior year approaches.

Because of all the services colleges offer visiting students and their families, it is usually better not to visit a college unannounced. Once you have decided on your vacation plans, check a college guide such as Peterson's Travel Guide to Colleges (see Selected College Guides) to find out what schools are in the area you are visiting. Write or call these schools and explain that you will be on campus for an unofficial visit and would like to take a tour. Most colleges will send you a packet of information about the campus that will include material about where to stay and what to see as well as a tour schedule.

If you feel you would like to talk to an admissions representative, make a request to do so. Do not, however, request to talk to a representative unless you are sincerely interested in the college. Admissions officers are busy people, and they do not have time to talk to every student who might be considering their college. In addition, be aware that if you do talk to someone in the admissions office this may count as your offi-

cial, on-campus interview even if you have not yet applied to the college. Unless there is a real possibility that you may not be able to get back for an official interview, I suggest that you do not ask to speak to an admissions representative. Your pre-application visit should be a preliminary look at a school you may wish to pursue once you are ready to make official application. Do not rush into an interview that could affect your chances of acceptance until you are fully prepared to do so.

It is a good idea to inquire about campus holidays and semester or quarter schedules when planning a visit. Arriving during semester break when everyone is away does not give you a very accurate picture of campus life. In addition, if you are planning to visit during the summer months, keep in mind that you are not seeing the college as it usually is. Chapter 3 describes the advantages and disadvantages of visiting in the summer versus the fall, and many of these factors affect a pre-application visit as well as an official interview trip.

One advantage of summer visits that you should remember is that dormitory space may be available for you and your family. Staying on campus even in the summer can give you a sense of what life would be like at a particular school. Many families enjoy this chance to explore campuses together.

If you would rather make some pre-application trips alone, you can certainly do so. Also, some cities have private college counseling firms that may take groups of students to campuses to visit. These trips usually involve a stay in a dorm, a tour, and a group interview information session. For such services in your area, check in your telephone yellow pages under "Educational Counseling" or "School/College Counseling Services."

Alumni Interviews

Colleges vary in the degree of involvement of their alumni in the admissions process. Some colleges such as Harvard, Radcliffe, and Georgetown require alumni interviews by all their applicants. These schools have large numbers of alumni representatives trained to conduct interviews which are written up and become part of an applicant's file. At other colleges like Yale and MIT, the alumni interview is not required, but it is strongly

recommended if an alumnus lives within fifty miles of the applicant. Over 90% of MIT applicants, for example, have alumni interviews.

Whether alumni interviews are required or strongly recommended, however, you can be sure that the alumni you talk with in an official capacity are thoroughly prepared to represent their college.

To get a picture of how carefully alumni interviewers are selected and trained, consider the process at MIT. Peter H. Richardson, Director of Admissions at MIT, described their alumni system as a group of over 1500 well-trained educational counselors. These alumni are considered to be public relations representatives for MIT, and one of their purposes is to provide accurate, up-to-date information about the college. Another job they have is to report to the admissions committee, giving them information about the applicants they interview. They write-up each interview and submit their comments to be filed in an applicant's folder just as an admissions director does. To prepare the alumni for this responsibility, volunteers receive many alumni and admissions office publications that update their information about what is happening on campus. In addition, admissions office representatives travel to over 100 cities each year to talk directly to alumni volunteers. Also, when their interview reports are read by admissions directors during the selection process, they are evaluated for their completeness and helpfulness. In essence, alumni interviewers are evaluated for each interview report they submit to the admissions office. If the readers do not feel the alumni interviewer is doing a good job, the alumnus will hear about it. Clearly, every attempt is made at MIT to make the alumni interview as informative as possible both for the admissions office and for you, the applicant.

All of this information should illustrate to you that most colleges take alumni interviews very seriously. You, in turn, should do the same. If an alumnus from a college to which you have applied calls and requests an interview, you should make every effort to meet with the person. Occasionally, even if you have had an on-campus interview, the admissions committee may request that an alumnus talk with you to get some extra in-

formation. This could mean you are being considered, but the committee wants to know a bit more about you. Do not waste this opportunity to give them the data they need.

It is not a bad idea to make an effort to contact alumni once you have selected the schools to which you are going to apply so that you can initiate interviews. Request this information from the admissions office or check the telephone book for local alumni groups. Since most colleges will accept both an on-campus and an alumni interview, you have nothing to lose by having both. Also, should you be prevented from visiting a campus for some reason, having your alumni interview will give you at least one interview experience which will be represented in your file.

Another situation that might arise in which you would want to initiate an alumni interview is if you do not feel that your on-campus interview went well. You may feel that because of nervousness or the fact that you were having a bad day you did not represent yourself well when you were in the admissions office. If your on-campus interview is not what you had hoped, it might also be that your interviewer did not do a very good job. Whatever the problem, it is good to know that the alumni interview offers another chance. Rather than forgetting about a school because of one bad experience, talk to an alumnus before you make any decision. Alumni interviews do offer a chance to have another human encounter with a representative from the admissions office.

Because you have no way of knowing how a particular college values alumni interviews, your preparation for all of them should be as thorough as it would be for an on-campus interview. Alumni representatives will generally follow the stages of the interview described in Chapter 4, and you should be ready to ask and answer questions intelligently. Your nonverbal communication including your dress should show the interviewer that you are a mature applicant who is ready for the transition from high school to college (see Chapter 3). Just because the interview may take place in your home or in the home of the interviewer, there is no reason to react less maturely than you would in the admissions office. A thank you note is also called for, showing that you appreciate the time and effort the person gave you (see Chapter

5). Alumni interviewers should be treated with the same respect you give an admissions officer since they are, after all, an extension of the admissions office.

# Appendix B
# Practice Interview Questions

The questions given below vary in their degree of difficulty, but any of them could be possible interview questions. Ask a friend or family member to go through some of the questions with you and critique your responses. Do not try to memorize a response to each question. The questions are meant to give you practice in thinking of responses quickly so that you will be more relaxed in your actual interview.

What is your proudest accomplishment in high school?

What are you thinking of as a possible college major?

Why did you pick your major?

How would you like to be described by a good friend?

What is the best attribute you will bring to our college if you are accepted?

What subject did you like best in high school? least?

If you could not attend college, what would you do?

Do you think academics or extracurricular activities are more important in high school?

Who are your heroes?

What do you dislike about school?

What books have you read this year other than texts?

If you could write your interview report, what would you say?

Why did you decide to apply to our college?

What has been your weakest area of study in high school?

How do you feel about . . . (have your practice interviewer insert any current event or topic of interest)?

Do you think a college degree is necessary for success?

What turns you off the most about people?

What makes you the happiest? the maddest? the most frustrated?

Can you think of a book (or movie) you have recommended to a friend this year? Why did you recommend it?

What attributes do you look for in a good friend?

Tell me about your favorite teacher.

If you were given one million dollars, how would you spend it?

If you could take a trip anywhere in the world for a week, where would you go and why?

What is the best movie you have seen in the past year? Why do you classify it as best?

What are some of your most positive attributes?

What are the three things you value most in your life?

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time and why?

Name some of the attributes you feel are necessary for a person to be a success.

If you could pick any state in the U. S. or any country, where would you like to live? Why?

What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

Tell me three adjectives that describe you and your personality.

If you had six months free to do anything and money was not a problem, what would you do?

What was your most recent "big decision" and how did you arrive at it?

If you had the choice of being a millionaire with little personal time or a comfortable middle class person with lots of personal time, which would you pick and why?

What would you do if you never had to worry about working for a living?

# Appendix C

# Interview Evaluation Form

NAME OF COLLEGE_____

DATE OF VISIT_____

NAME OF INTERVIEWER_____

TITLE OF INTERVIEWER_____

ADDRESS OF INTERVIEWER_____

_____

_____

| REACTIONS TO THE INTERVIEW | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| I was treated courteously by the admissions office staff. | ____ | ____ |
| My interview started on time. | ____ | ____ |
| My interviewer seemed familiar with my application. | ____ | ____ |
| My interviewer asked good, probing questions. | ____ | ____ |
| My interviewer seemed interested in what I had to say. | ____ | ____ |
| I got good answers to my questions. | ____ | ____ |
| On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being best, I would rate my interviewer | | ____ |

NAME OF COLLEGE _____

| EVALUATION OF YOUR ROLE IN THE INTERVIEW | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| I arrived on time. | ____ | ____ |
| I felt I was dressed appropriately. | ____ | ____ |
| I shook hands with my interviewer. | ____ | ____ |
| I felt comfortable discussing my academic background. | ____ | ____ |
| I felt comfortable discussing my extracurricular activities. | ____ | ____ |
| I emphasized my best attributes. | ____ | ____ |

List some of the specific things you discussed.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I was able to answer all the questions the interviewer asked me. | ____ | ____ |
| I answered all questions thoroughly. | ____ | ____ |

List any specific questions you can remember and put a check mark by any that gave you trouble.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I talked at least 50%-70% of the time. | ____ | ____ |
| I asked good questions. | ____ | ____ |

List the questions you remember asking.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I thanked the interviewer by name at the close of the interview and shook hands. | ____ | ____ |
| I made sure to get a business card or to remember my interviewer's name. | ____ | ____ |

NAME OF COLLEGE_____

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| I was able to control any nervous mannerisms throughout the interview. | ____ | ____ |

Looking over your responses to the above statements, what would you have changed about your role in this interview?

IMPORTANT TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Make a note of anything discussed in the interview that might be remembered by your interviewer. You will want to refer to this in your thank you letter to help your interviewer remember exactly who you are.

REACTIONS TO THE CAMPUS VISIT

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The campus seems like a pleasant environment. | ____ | ____ |
| The campus seems safe. | ____ | ____ |
| The dorms are acceptable. | ____ | ____ |

List your preference for a particular dorm if you have one.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The campus food was okay. | ____ | ____ |
| The students seem to like the school. | ____ | ____ |
| The library seems good. | ____ | ____ |
| The labs (if applicable) seem good. | ____ | ____ |
| The gym (if applicable) seems good. | ____ | ____ |

NAME OF COLLEGE_____

List any specific student comments you can remember.

Write down any particular reactions you had to this campus or anything you would like to remember.

# Appendix D
# Questionnaire Statistics

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW
QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____ SCHOOL_____
(please print)

Please check all appropriate choices:

*Formal, on-campus or alumni admissions interviews at my institution are

_____required.

_____not required but strongly recommended.

_____optional.

_____not required.

_____other (please explain).

*The percentage of applicants who have on-campus or alumni interviews is approximately:

| (Formal interviews) | | (Casual or informational interviews) |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | 0 - 10% | _____ |
| _____ | 10 - 20% | _____ |
| _____ | 20 - 50% | _____ |
| _____ | greater than 50% | _____ |

*Interview evaluations

_____are as important as grades and SAT scores in the decision-making process.

_____could influence the decision between applicants who are otherwise equal.

_____could influence the decision to accept applicants with lower than average grades or SAT scores.

_____are filed but do not affect the decision-making process.

_____are not filed.

In the space provided below and on the back of this sheet, please respond:

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE STUDENTS PREPARING TO INTERVIEW?

Statistics from the Survey

For the first question asking if the interview is required, the largest percentage of state schools (75%) said, "not required." The majority of the private colleges, on the other hand, said that it is "not required but strongly recommended" (60%), and 8 private colleges responded that the interview is "required." Here is exactly how the state and private colleges responded:

| STATE | | PRIVATE |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | required. | 8 |
| 3 | not required but strongly recommended. | 30 |
| 7 | optional. | 4 |
| 35 | not required. | 7 |
| 2 | other. | 1 |

Obviously, the interview is perceived very differently in state and private colleges. The statistics of the percentage of students who interview verifies this point. For private colleges, the largest percentage (51%) said that greater than 50% of their applicants have formal interviews either on campus or with an alumnus. The state schools fell predominately into the 0-10% category.

Looking at the significance of the interview evaluation again confirms the difference between the use of the interview in state and private institutions. For the private colleges, most admissions directors responded that the interview "could influence the decision between applicants who are otherwise equal," and "could influence the decision to accept applicants

with lower than average grades and SAT scores." Two colleges even listed the interview as being "as important as grades and SAT scores in the decision-making process" (Bennington and Brigham Young University). State universities were the reverse of this with most responding that evaluations "are not filed."

# Selected College Guides

The following is not meant to be a complete list of college guides. The ones that appear here are readily available at most bookstores and libraries. You will find others in the Study Aids section of any bookstore or library.

Barron's Annual Guide to Undergraduate Study--4-Year Colleges

Guide to the Best, Most Popular and Most Exciting Colleges

Guide to the Most Prestigious Colleges

Profiles of American Colleges

The College Board The College Handbook

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On Getting Into College

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*"This book clearly defines what a prospective student should expect when entering an admissions interview as well as the total search for a college that best suits the individual's needs."*

Anne Baldwin, Associate Director of Admissions,
Alfred University

*"The section of the book regarding interview preparation was exceptional!"*

Melissa McGraugh, Admissions Counselor,
Saint Louis University

**Ann S. Utterback** has taught speech communication and interviewing techniques for over fourteen years at colleges and universities across the country. She is now a communication consultant in Washington, D.C., where much of her work involves educational consulting and college advisory services. She also teaches at the University of Maryland, College Park campus. Dr. Utterback's Ph.D. is from Southern Illinois University. In addition to this book, she has written and produced Improving Your Speaking Voice, a text/tape package available from Transemantics, Inc.